

JUL 15 1957

LIBRARY SCIENCE  
LIBRARY

THE  
ASSISTANT  
LIBRARIAN

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE A.A.L.

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CONTROVERSY

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# THE ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN

Official Journal of the Association of Assistant Librarians

(Section of the Library Association)

EDITOR: W. G. SMITH.

Westminster Public Libraries, Buckingham Palace Road, London, S.W.1.

VOL. 50 NO. 7

JULY, 1957.

## *Birmingham Blues*

### **B**irmingham Librarians are trying to censor the Assistant Librarian

One would have thought that the library which so meekly accepted the recent Government banning of its import of the works of Genet would be bowing its head in shame. Instead, it wishes to extend its heavy hand to these pages.

In our April issue we printed, with the author's permission, an extract from Mr. Henry Garnett's letter to his daughter who is a full-time library school student at Ealing Polytechnic. He complained of a poor service at Birmingham Reference Library and mentioned the privileged service he received when it was discovered that he was a well-known local author.

How did Birmingham's librarians react? Did they reply vigorously that Mr. Garnett may not have had the best of service on this occasion, but that their normal standards are high and that they are proud of them? Did they point to the riches of Birmingham's unrivalled collections in some literary fields and of their national contribution to learning? Did they, in fact, do what any person skilled in dealing with the public would have done; accept the complaint and take the opportunity to make good propaganda for their library (as the young lady from Gloucester does so admirably on page 113 of this issue)?

They did not. Instead the A.A.L. Secretary received a letter from the Staff Guild saying that the facts were inaccurate (in what respect they did not say), that it was in bad taste, and demanding an *apology for the article having been printed*.

To deny the facts is one thing; to claim that an article should not have been printed because it happens to be critical is quite another, and very dangerous principle of which librarians, of all people, should beware.

### *Shoot the Referee*

Just how far does Birmingham want to go? Would it complain to the local newspaper for printing a resident's criticism of the library? Perhaps the sporting journalists should never report a penalty being given against Aston Villa? This attitude is like that of a schoolboy at the football match who yells "foul" every

time his own team is tackled and "shoot the referee" every time they are caught infringing the rules. But most schoolboys grow up and realise that there is good and bad in every team.

The cricket correspondent of *The Observer* recently underlined the dangers of over-caution and stilted thinking by saying, "Mediocrity breeds defensive tactics in self-preservation: but they have become so habitual that they are pursued by captains even when they hold a full house." We do not say that Birmingham's librarians are mediocre, but it does seem that "defensive tactics in self-preservation" have become habitual with them.

We have something to be proud of in most of our libraries. Let us tell people about them and let us accept the inevitable corollary that some of these people will find things to criticise. All the better. If someone is sufficiently interested to criticise, he will often be sufficiently interested to listen to an explanation and to appreciate the good service he will get later on. Many a critic can be made into a friend, but irritation and ill-will can be the only result of mere moaning that anyone should dare to criticise our hallowed precincts..

### **Multitude of Nonentities**

Another protest from the local group of the Reference and Special Libraries Section says that we have contravened the accepted standards of library journalism. We do not know exactly what these standards are but, looking at most of the other journals, we can only say that we are very proud to have departed from them.

*The Times*, referring on May 9th to the recent books by Ian Johnson and Jim Laker, said that they fall into a class "overcrowded with a multitude of nonentities." We suggest that this applies equally to our library journals. "The fault," said *The Times*, "is not altogether that of the writers. There are conventions in these things, and so even the mildest word of criticism of a player . . . is immediately qualified by the automatic assurance that we are, of course, the greatest of friends." How much more could legitimately be written and conveyed if only they "would break out of the deadening formula that governs their books." How much more could legitimately be written and conveyed if only our library journals would break out of the same deadening conformity.

### **Good Taste**

We are accused of "poor taste" in printing criticism of Birmingham. This is another term which has been so prostituted that it has become synonymous with with mediocrity. It has even extended to political journalism. About two years ago, the very respectable political columnist, Henry Fairlie, criticised, in the *Spectator*, a member of the Government by name and was assailed in the sacred name of good taste. His reply was that this was



not a question of good taste, but of rigid conformity with a standard that allowed no possible deviation from its pattern.

The fundamental issue, he said, is freedom, "and freedom's main enemy to-day is not censorship by government, but the censorship imposed by an atmosphere of moderation and good taste which stifles—and is intended to stifle" (*Spectator*, July 29, 1955).

We suggest that our critics are not really concerned with good taste, but with this stifling form of censorship. We suggest that their attitude is contrary to the highest standards of librarianship. If anyone owes an apology it is Birmingham—to your Editor.



## Your Views

I am forced to spring, instantly and inwardly propelled, to the defence of library staffs. How much longer and how much more often are we to read these inane criticisms which in this particular instance is in extreme bad taste.

Of Henry Garnett I know nothing, nor do I wish to know if he is the type of man he has shown himself to be in the published letter to his daughter, Margaret Cook. He had only to walk to the counter of the Birmingham Reference Library as I have often done) and ask not even politely for an answer to his question. But because he is not immediately recognised for what he is ("am I to be treated like a commercial traveller") the assistants male and female are apish nincompoops, flat-chested, round-shouldered, untidy-haired, shapeless-featured, surly and quite distressing.

Let Mr. Garnett put himself for one day inside one of these egg-stained waistcoats and he will realise that librarians are forced to pander to a crassly stupid section of the public who are blind to the most eye-arresting notices, who when told to turn left will turn right and who expect a book to be renewed by simply giving a summary of the story. This and more we do, and do cheerfully and helpfully.

In my ten years of experience as a public librarian, I would say with all honesty that librarians are the most courteous, patient, intelligent, helpful and long-suffering of all servants of the public.

JEAN M. REID, *Gloucestershire County Library.*

Mr. Henry Garnett asks with what vision the unprivileged reader walks out of Birmingham Reference Library.

May this not depend on whether he walked in with sufficient humility to see his fellow men and women as they really are, and with sufficient imagination to envisage the possibility of the Hosts of Heaven being entirely Black? Given such humility and imagination, who shall say he's unprivileged?

SHEILA E. THACKER, *Edmonton Public Libraries.*

I am informed by the Editor of the *Assistant Librarian* that adverse comment is always good news value. I see elsewhere that his charm has recently been praised and that he is "getting away with murder" in the *Assistant Librarian* as a result.

A correspondent in a previous issue of this illustrious journal has also praised the present trends of the magazine, saying that he is sure that it is more stimulating and read more than ever before. The *Daily Mirror* enjoys one of the largest circulations to-day. But, surely, the nadir has been reached in the April issue.

I refuse to believe that a library with an established and great reputation like that of the City of Birmingham employs staff in its Reference Library who would simply ignore a person who made himself known or even looked as if he was there and required help. I refuse to believe the facts, as stated.

Is it that Mr. Garnett stood around looking for trouble and has represented every just rule and regulation of this department as a mountain, when really it is but a molehill? Is it because he refused to comply with the same practice adopted by all other users of this Department that he was ignored?

The malignant "humour" of this pipsqueak Kingsley Amis I find beneath contempt; obviously there is a possibility of collusion between his correspondent (his daughter) and himself to "write-up" a diatribe and "make 'em squirm," although such a pre-arrangement would never be admitted, doubtless. This letter is a mixture of sartorial snobbery and meretricious propaganda. The statements are offensive to the extreme to the staff of the Birmingham Reference Library; in fact, are they not in themselves grounds enough to constitute a written libel?

I strongly reprehend the Editor for allowing such tabloid Press "private-eye" rubbish in what used to be a journal with some standard of decency. The "Teddy Boys" of librarianship, the "l'avant-garde," will undoubtedly chortle, as long as their own libraries and local authorities are not at the receiving end. This is not "ginger." It is murderous misrepresentation masquerading as criticism.

Or are we now to have "informers" who will visit various libraries and then get some precocious relative to write in to our fair-minded Editor?

"CHUCK IT, . . . Smith!"

E. A. WILLATS, *Islington Public Libraries.*

## A Case of Public Relations

I hope that the rumours of a protest from the Birmingham Staff Guild, against the publishing in the *Assistant* of the extract from the Garnett letter, are unfounded.

If, however, there is an Association of Midland Writers, I confidently expect a strong protest from them and possibly a suggestion that there are better Birmingham walls to quote from.

The extract as printed illustrates very clearly the reaction of many readers to what they consider to be inefficient service. That the complaint in question is expressed in mental pus is only a difference of degree.

In most public libraries the service offered—in cramped buildings, without adequate staff or stock—falls short of the highest standards. These shortcomings are often attributed by "residents" to the fact that facilities are extended to "foreigners," particularly the most obviously-foreign—the coloured students.

It is not important that Birmingham Library is named (except as an example of the sound principle of naming names) for surely none of us would say "It couldn't happen here."

What is important is the question of public relations; the fact that every one of us is responsible for *good* public relations. To this end we must try to give the best possible service at all times and, what is equally essential, shirk no opportunity (or challenge, according to one's point of view) to explain to readers the true reasons for the deficiencies of our library services.

FRANK ATKINSON, *Hampstead Public Libraries.*

## FROM THE BIRMINGHAM CHIEF LIBRARIAN : A Scurrilous Article?

The April issue of *The Assistant Librarian* contained an article headed "THE PRIVILEGED READER: an excerpt from a letter received by Margaret Cook, a pupil at Ealing School of Librarianship, from her father, Henry Garnett, a Midland writer." The letter purports to be a description of the assistants and service in the Birmingham Reference Library.

From records here I am satisfied that the letter was written by Mr. Garnett after a visit to the Reference Library on February 5th when he requested that certain information should be sent to him by post (he is

apparently a resident of Malvern). This was done on February 13th. It was therefore easy to identify the two assistants who spoke to him on February 5th, and who, with other members of my staff, are the subject of your scurrilous article.

I addressed a protest to Mr. Garnett, and denied most of the statements in his letter. He replied that he had no idea such an article was to be published, and that the private letter from which it was extracted did not pretend to present a factual account of the Reference Library, but gave a picture of the borrower's state of mind. He also informed me that during the years he has used the Birmingham Reference Library, he has never found the assistants other than helpful or courteous.

Mr. Garnett's letter to me makes it clear that you had no authority to publish the excerpt from his letter. I can only conclude that in taking the unusual step of publishing a private letter without the writer's consent you were animated by a desire to attack the Birmingham staff. In justice to them, I must ask for publication of the above facts in *The Assistant Librarian*. An apology on behalf of your Association has, I am told, been tendered to the Birmingham Staff Association.

I hope the Ealing School of Librarianship curriculum includes at least one lecture on the courtesies usually observed by recipients of private letters.

VICTOR WOODS, *City Librarian, Birmingham.*

### **Mr. Henry Garnett comments:**

It seems to me that a great deal of fuss is being made over the trifle published under the heading of *The Privileged Reader*. I think, however, since the fuss is being made and since a number of regrettable comments have been addressed direct to me, it will be as well to make the position as clear as is possible.

The original was written in a personal letter from me to Miss Margaret Cook. It ought to be evident to any reader that my letter was not intended to represent the facts, but did in truth give a facetious picture of a borrower's attitude of mind. It is most certainly true that Miss Cook asked if she could use my name in any contribution to your magazine. To this I replied that I had no objection. I am convinced that during the conversation about my letter, Miss Cook thought that I was giving permission for her to quote its contents. I did not think that she intended to quote passages verbatim and, indeed, there are phrases that I should not have written for publication. There is no doubt whatever that Miss Cook acted in good faith. There seems to be a misunderstanding in various quarters and it is, of course, a fact that all library staffs have, without exception, been courteous and helpful to me.

I am told by Miss Margaret Cook's mother that a malevolent fairy at her birth cursed her with a sense of humour.

If it is any help, you make any use you wish of this letter.

### **From the Editor:**

When the original article was received, we referred it back to Miss Cook on the grounds that the copyright belonged to her father, but she assured us that she had his permission for it to be printed. Although there may have been some misunderstanding between Miss Cook and her father, reasonable editorial precautions were taken before printing.

No apology has been given for printing the article. We are, of course, sorry that some Birmingham members are upset. We are always sorry to see a cricketer hurt, but that does not mean that we wish the game had never started. It would be impossible to run a live journal without hurting somebody's feelings occasionally.

Many will agree with Mr. Garnett that a great deal of fuss is being made about a minor matter. "It seems to me," says Miss Cook, in a letter, "that Birmingham are showing up very badly over this business." How right she is. Many people spoke to us with approval of the article, but none of them imagined that the Birmingham assistant really appeared "festooned in cobwebs" or with egg on his waistcoat. Of course, Mr. Woods, it gave a "picture of the borrower's state of mind" as anyone with an ounce of humour would have realised at the time. Is it not a good thing for us to know something of borrowers' attitudes? This uproar would be funny if it were not tragic that public relations should be handled with such a hammy fist.

The last sentence of Mr. Woods's letter seems to be as insulting to Ealing Library School as he alleges the original article was to Birmingham. We are sure, however, that the tutors and students there will have the good sense not to believe that he is "animated by a desire to attack" them.

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# RICH AND RARE?

*Some thought on supply (of Librarians) and demand  
(for higher salaries)*

by A. C. Jones

In spite of spirited opposition by librarians F. Fenton and R. E. Richards in the February issue of *Public Service*, it is likely that by the time this appears in print NALGO will be wedded to a policy of "sectional" pay claims based on supply and demand in individual professions. A move to reject this policy as "merely opportunist and expedient" was rejected by the N.E.C. in February, and if the policy is supported by the Nalگو Annual Conference at Bournemouth, local government librarians might well find themselves enduring a salary freeze while their fellow officers in the rarer professions are borne steadily up the A.P.T. scales by the law of supply and demand.

*"My life will be sour grapes and ashes without you."*

DAISY ASHFORD *The Young Visitors.*

Even without the intervention of NALGO, this sort of thing is already happening, as Mr. Richards has pointed out. Whatever the outcome of the NALGO conference we shall hear from time to time of wholesale regradings of architects, engineers and public health inspectors in order either to retain good men in their present departments or to lure others from less watchful authorities. Meanwhile a library post advertised on Grade APT I seldom fails to attract sufficient suitable applicants to form a respectable short-list. When it does, the solution is more often to reduce the qualifications required than to increase the salary offered—the need for qualified librarians is less easily demonstrated than the need for qualified engineers. Rarity value to us is a bunch of sour grapes—and we have a shrewd idea that they really *are* sour.

As a policy, reliance on the law of supply and demand is "opportunist and expedient." But that is only to say that it is realistic. Instead of sitting outside among the have-nots bewailing our abundance, we might better consider whether it would be possible to increase our own rarity value. (The Library Association may not be a trade union, but at least it has the power to control the number of Chartered Librarians.)

*"Omne rarum carum, vilescit quotidianum"*

*(All that is rare is dear, that which is everyday is cheap).*

First, however, we must be sure that the grapes really are not sour—that is to say we must seek to prevent the lowering of standards which at present too often takes place when a post cannot be filled at the low (but not technically "inadequate") salary offered.

If this is to be done without preventing authorities from paying partly qualified assistants on APT scales if they wish (surely not a thing which we should wish to prevent *per se*), it would seem necessary to establish not only that certain posts should be graded in the APT Division, but also that they must be occupied by Chartered Librarians. There is increasing confidence in the actions of the L.A. in this field, and this might now permit effective pressure to be brought even on unqualified members; on the other hand, a thorough survey of establishments throughout the country, based on a job classification such as that recently recommended to the L.A. by the A.A.L., would make possible a considerable extension of L.A. influence on local authorities. Such action could never

be one hundred per cent. effective; but it could reduce the flow to a trickle.

*"Omnia praeclara rara—"*  
(All things which excel are rare).

CICERO.

There remains the problem of our scarcity value—how to ensure that only a post advertised at a *more than adequate* salary will receive suitable applicants. The expediency of engineering such a situation cannot be denied. The ethics, and the practical value to librarianship rather than to individual librarians, must be matter for discussion.

There is no lack of precedent for such a course. It is common trade union practice with regard to indentured apprenticeships in industry, and the National Union of Teachers recently supported a similar policy with regard to the training of teachers for the "bulge."

The method by which a healthy scarcity of qualified librarians might be achieved, and the point at which it is desired, must be carefully considered. The present period of reorganization and examination revision is clearly an opportune time for such consideration. The number of Chartered Librarians must be related to the number of suitable posts, but it is surely self-evident that the number of newly qualified librarians each year should *not* be related to the number of *advertisements* during that year (though the contrary has been alleged). A Micawber-wise ratio—ten fewer librarians than posts rather than ten more—would seem to be desirable at certain levels.

*"Voluptates commendat rarior usus—"*  
(Rarity enhances pleasures).

JUVENAL.

Rearrangement of the examinations is now in progress; some re-valuation is implied, and this must have its effect. The Final examination in particular calls for and will doubtless receive careful scrutiny in this respect. What is needed, however, is some means of *regulating* the supply of qualified librarians according to demand. This could most simply be done by means of a competitive examination for a varying number of annual places. (The fact that this would presumably be over the dead bodies of some of our educators for librarianship need not necessarily be a deterrent). Or some qualification other than the examination could perhaps be varied—age limit or length of experience, for example.

If no action is taken then we can expect that the law of supply and demand *will* operate in our profession, but gradually and to the detriment of our service. As the rewards of librarianship fall behind those of other professions, our standard of recruitment will fall until it becomes necessary to improve our lot. The cycle will then repeat itself—only positive action will enable us to break out of this circle.

I am content in this article only to indicate possibilities. What is first needed is some discussion of principles, and this I hope will now be forthcoming.

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## MOBILE LIBRARIES

## Vehicular Service

In our May issue Mrs. Joan Firth made some acid comments on two mobile librarians, Miss Jo. Eldridge and R. M. Lyle, who had given details of the Leicestershire 'Van' Service. In the comments below Mrs. Firth is herself under fire.

From R. M. Lyle (who has now moved to Herefordshire County Library):-

I did not realise that it was possible for anyone of intelligence to gain so many misconceptions from a plain statement of facts—there must have been an outside bee in the Easter bonnet of Joan Firth!

What utter nonsense to object to the word "van"—I must ask the garage foreman to wash down the "vehicular bookmobile" and watch his face! Old vans, new vans, borrowed vans, blue vans—yes, dear lady, vans they are whether U like it or not.

There was no suggestion of *bemoaning* the fact that rules could not be enforced. All mobile librarians bend, stretch and break them to help to accommodate the readers.

Joan Firth has been fortunate in always having the time to help her readers—she obviously has never issued between 200—250 books per hour, she'ved returns and moved the van round the village. We all like to be able to give leisurely and charming assistance, but it is not always possible. Leicestershire librarians are well-known for their helpful and willing assistance to readers, as any of the latter would confirm. I do hope that Mrs. Firth's readers like being "led on" to better books—does it never occur to these well-meaning librarians that the relaxation provided by a book can be just as valuable as the education given by a "better" book?

Mrs. Firth is too coy to name her authority, but if the supply of mobile librarians exceeds the demand, obviously the standard set is considerably lower than elsewhere.

Having spent over six years as a mobile librarian, and recently returned to the work thankfully after a spell in a branch library, the most unfortunate of the impressions was that I regarded the work as a penance. I love it, and the country people are wonderful characters and friends. A grand job—for the right person.

From C. D. Needham, Kent County Library:-

My most lenient judgment of Mrs. Firth is that she misunderstood the nature of the original article which she sets out to criticise. It was written in answer to a request for factual and statistical information on running a mobile library. Unfortunately Mrs. Firth has read it emotionally: and with how nauseating a result. Her article reminded me of one of those cheap (I mean morally and intellectually, of course) American text books on ideal book selection which one is unfortunately forced to plough through now and again. Perhaps one or two phrases in the original article were, as Miss Eldridge herself admits, unhappy; but let us not be petty, it was distinctly useful and interesting.

Mrs. Firth complains of the defeatist tone of the original. I hadn't noticed it. On the contrary, apart from the fact that the writers *say* they enjoy the life, I felt that they described the routines of mobile librarianship with evident gusto. After all, there are routine tasks even in mobile



libraries, and although, in common with most librarians, I am always eager to find ways of lessening drudgery, I sometimes think that a good shot of routine is the only antidote to that disease of facile idealism from which Mrs. Firth seems to suffer so tragically.

And then that "van" business . . . Still, I am quite willing to admit that words do vary from county to county and perhaps the farmers in the West Riding have taken to using vehicular harvesters since I was last up there. Mrs. Firth's idea of "inhibition" is the sort of thing one would expect of someone just emerging from a finishing school for young ladies. It isn't worthy of an "open-air" librarian.

There is no justification whatever for Mrs. Firth's criticism that Mr. Lyle and Miss Eldridge "tackle the job as though they were delivering the groceries." They mention "assistance to readers" with an "of course" implying that they have faith that their readers will understand all that that means without further elaboration. But, oh dear, Mrs. Firth has to go and embarrass everybody by summing it up as: "Two for Mr. A. and the usual for Mr. B." Need Mrs. Firth tackle the job as though she were behind a bar?

Mrs. Firth's insistence on the abundance of drivers shows a lack of understanding of the system described by the Leicestershire librarians. So does her comment on staffing. Anybody who has worked with country people will agree that they need the best professional attention—but the whole paragraph is irrelevant as criticism, as are the last two paragraphs which, to borrow a phrase from Mrs. Firth, are "too horrible for comment."

Please, Mr. Editor, spare us such rubbish in the future. If this is what is in for those examinees who, following their tutors' advice, "read up professional literature," is it any wonder that so many give up? And who's going to want to peddle a crate round the countryside now, after reading that.

## ASKEWS OF PRESTON

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We hear of a library committee which has ordered that the Encyclopaedia Britannica be removed from stock because of its undue American influence.



# YOUR Letters

## Reading the Record

Miss Eggleston destroys her own argument by needing to be "inveigled" into reading the *L.A. Record*. If it was interesting, no persuasion would be necessary and the question would not arise—surely she does not seriously claim that to read the *Record* prevents stagnation? Rather the opposite! It is a very sweeping condemnation to accuse all those who find the *Record* dull of having a narrow viewpoint—that must mean about 90 per cent. of the Association.

I hope Miss Eggleston noted the comments of Mr. Callender in the *April Assistant* (page 59) about assistants being "press ganged" into the *L.A.* It all comes to the same point—being made to pay for something one does not want and could well do without.

At the A.A.L. Conference, Mr. Clough was "amazed and surprised" to find people who thought the *Record* was doing a good job. So am I, Sir, so am I, —won't you join me in stagnation?

R. M. LYLE, *Herefordshire County Library*.

Most of the material contained in issues of the *Library Association Record* could be disseminated with greater economy by the use of different media, according to the type of contribution.

For example, the interesting and erudite articles by Prof. Irwin on the history of libraries should not appear in periodical form at all, but should be collated and published properly in book-form for the general public, as well as librarians, to read. Articles on special techniques, descriptions of various libraries, and so on, should similarly be collected, sifted out and published by the Library Association in text book form. Other matter, which it is not proposed to publish in this way, could be deposited in the library of the *L.A.*, and in the libraries of the various library schools, a short duplicated list being sent to all libraries indicating the existence of this material. Articles of more general interest should surely be found in such papers as *The Times Literary Supplement* or the *Book-seller*. I have in mind such matter as Presidential Addresses, prize essays, and articles on Carnegie medal winners: things which seem to me of no great moment as far as the library profession is especially concerned, but which may find interested readers among the general public.

In this way, members of the *L.A.* will not have in their homes a voluminous collection of material concerned mostly with irrelevancies of the type described above; nor would we have to wade through piles of this stuff to find an article which is important for study purposes, as it would be published in book form along with other material on the same subject.

Really vital and topical material should, of course, be distributed to libraries: I suggest the admirable *Liaison* as a suitable vehicle for conveying really important information.

The money saved by adopting such economic measures should be put to the extremely urgent and long overdue matter of professional publicity, a topic about which I am sure most of your readers have much to say!

R. LLOYD, *Tottenham Public Libraries*.

## Is It Worth While

Are librarians human? It must depend which librarians and how human you want them to be. After all no-one who is human *likes* work except now and again. Few librarians like work all the time. Some of the time, some of the work is worthy of a human being. Some of the work is creative, some of the time. It is the unpredictable element in Librarianship which leaves room for some hope. That element can be creative, and not secondhand if it assembles material which an inventor or poet or scientist could not have assembled for himself. Without you, the librarian, these people could not send out in the world their machine with wings that don't flap, their embryo, "The force that drives the green fuse in the waste land," their homogenized milk. You have helped to change the world: you can be said to have changed the world.

And was it worth while after all? Of course it was. Perhaps you can sit down in your backwater and write a novel about an inventor, a poet and a scientist. Without them you could not create them. The process can be reciprocal.

TONY SHEARMAN, *North-Western Polytechnic Library School.*

## Yorkshire Archives

The Yorkshire Diviison of the A.A.L. held its inaugural meeting at Leeds on December 13th, 1906. This year we are to celebrate, if belatedly, our 50th Anniversary. We shall hold a special anniversary meeting, at which it is hoped many old members of the Division will be present, later in the year.

May I appeal to any members of the A.A.L. (Yorkshire Division) past and present, who have any photographs, leaflets, souvenirs, or mementos of meetings and outings organised by the Division, to lend them to us in order to create a display at the meeting. Contributions will be gratefully acknowledged and returned when the exhibition is over. Please turn out your bottom drawers and ransack your personal files, and if you can find time to append a note to the effect that "the callow youth, second from the left in the middle row is now Chief Librarian of . . ." we shall be most grateful. The address is Central Library, Albion Street, Hull.

WILLIAM R. FLINT, *Chairman, Yorkshire Diviison A.A.L.*

## Who's Confusing Who ?

It is surely time that the running battle which Mr. W. Howard Phillips has been conducting in print for the past three years over the use of the Dewey Decimal Classification in the Registration examination should be brought to a close. It should also be recognised that it is an upheaval of his own making. At no time has there been any official suggestion that students are expected to produce for books set in the practical paper the same notation as that produced by B.N.B. for the same books.

There are, in fact, at least three reasons why they should (possibly) differ. (1) B.N.B. is a development of Dewey's scheme, based on Ranganathan's PMEST formula. (2) On the basis on (1) B.N.B. provides a verbal extension of the notation, following the symbol [1], where the notation itself is not co-extensive with the subject of the book. (3) B.N.B. has incorporated revisions and new places provided by the 15th edition of the Decimal classification.

Thus an examination student, using the 13th or 14th edition of Dewey's scheme can produce a different notation from that given in B.N.B. for the same book and yet be correct. No one except Mr. Phillips and those whom he has confused, has ever doubted that, least of all students properly so-called. Cannot the matter rest there?

V. T. H. PARRY, *Asst. Librarian, Colonial Office Library.*

The editor's justification is that Mr. Phillips is looking after the interests of classification students. Classification, at the level of the Registration examination should be a relatively simple matter. Not long ago an examiner agreed with us that a thorough understanding of Phillips' *Primer of Classification* and the introductions to the various schemes is sufficient to pass the theoretical examination. That is still true, but tutors bitten by the Ranganathan-B.N.B. bug are building this minor technique of classification into a monstrous gargoyle from which a flood of ridiculous jargon is threatening to overflow its murky channel and destroy the saner roads of librarianship.

The second Phillipic represents a strategic withdrawal. Now B.N.B. is "competent and useful," though its classification is a potential danger to students and unacceptable as standard practice—presumably Sheffield has too much invested in its "Index to the index" for the advantages of national cataloguing and classification to be considered sufficient reason for changing local practice—there will have to be a national library service first.

# UN-BIRMINGHAM ACTIVITIES

## Council Notes—16th May

On 16th May the standards and behaviour of the Press were being called into question in the House of Commons. In the Council Chamber at Chaucer House the debate took a similar turn. A small bomb called *The Privileged Reader* was exploded in the *April Assistant*, and the fallout which descended on the Council seemed to indicate that in Birmingham's opinion at least the bomb was not a very "clean" one.

The Council heard the full story of attempts to achieve a settlement out of court, of apologies offered by the Honorary Secretary (not for publication of the letter, but for the offence given to the susceptibilities of the Birmingham staff), and of apologies rejected unless they were printed in bold type on page 1 of the *Assistant*. Grim details were related about incorrect facts, and it was ascertained that assistants in the British Museum of the Midlands wore neither egg on their waistcoats nor festoons of cobwebs about them when they emerged from the stacks. The West Midlands representatives told their tales of fury and ferment, and it seemed that the President's plea not to spend too much time on "this small item" would be ignored.

Mr. Tynemouth rose in an attempt to find a middle way, but could not resist putting the view that "the editor is not responsible for the views of his correspondents—and we are not responsible for the editor." Those who know Mr. Smith will inform you that he is not a man to miss his cue. He looked anything but repentant as he stood to inform us:

"I feel like Arthur Miller before the un-Birmingham activities committee. The heavens roared what many took to be approval, but the clapping thunder was greeted pessimistically by the Editor, who muttered, 'Even the gods dislike me.' I could not feel that Birmingham had taken their complaints so far."

"When in doubt, defer," is a good committee maxim. The Council accepted Mr. Tynemouth's advice that they should postpone further discussion until their next meeting in September. In the meantime space will be kept for Birmingham to take up the invitation to reply in the *Assistant*, the Midland representatives will take back the views and opinions expressed at Council, and the summer months will be given an opportunity to bring the whole affair to an amicable conclusion.

## ✓ Jobs for the Worms

From the Miller's tale to a tale of three chiefships. The regular item on posts at inadequate salaries included news of two of them, Grimsby and Lindsey and Holland (County). Intending candidates had been asked in *The Times Literary Supplement* to first contact the S.M.C.C.L. No such action had been taken by the L.A. on this occasion, although they had signified their support of the S.M.C.C.L. in a circular addressed to all Branch and Section secretaries. Mr. Muris again warned the Council that there were some members who refused to accept the S.M.C.C.L. whip, and the Honorary Secretary was asked to try to persuade the L.A. that they should also advertise in the *T.L.S.* so that this loophole should not be left open for the worms who might wish to crawl through it.

The third Chiefship was at Hinckley. From candidates attending the interview the Honorary Secretary had received murky details, and all of them were confirmed by Mr. Flint, who had himself been a candidate. He gave his opinion that any candidate accepting the appointment under the prevailing conditions should be ashamed. "I am sure he has every

right to be," said the President. The matter is now in the hands of the L.A. Membership Officer, and the Honorary Secretary in another capacity promised that the full details would be published as soon as possible.

So heavy was the business of the Council on this occasion that there is space to report only a few unusual and non-recurring items from the committees. From the Publications Committee came the news that *Resources Discovered*, the second A.A.L. film, has won a third award in a national competition. It is now to be entered in the Festival of Films in the Service of Industry competition. The Council, Mr. Phillips apart, seemed generally pleased to hear from the Education Committee that 21 A.A.L. tutors had attended the National Conference of Tutors held at Chaucer House in May, but they nevertheless support the committee in rejecting two motions connected with the organisation of correspondence courses which had been forwarded by the conference.

A motion from the G.L.D. Committee has now worked its way through the Finance Committee and A.A.L. Council, and is to be forwarded to the L.A. Council, who are asked to regard members on National Service as "not gainfully employed" (like married women) for the purpose of subscriptions, thus entitling them to the special rate of 15s.

### Parsimonious L. A. Council

The Finance Committee also reported an acknowledgement of the A.A.L.'s donation to the John Rylands Fund. In his letter to the Honorary Treasurer the Keeper of Printed Books at the John Rylands Library said:—

"It is most pleasing to us to know that our colleagues appreciate the difficulties under which the Library is labouring, and are so ready to come to our assistance in a practical manner." This gave Mr. Surridge an opportunity to comment on "the parsimonious attitude of the L.A. Council" towards the John Rylands Library Fund.

### Municipal Libraries Section

Undoubtedly the most important report on this occasion was that of the Policy Committee. The Council had before it the proposals and questions on Branch and Section Reorganisation set out in the April *L.A. Record*. The views of all the divisional committees had been sought, and the Policy Committee had put in some hard and useful work the previous afternoon to come forward with a set of recommendations which, surprisingly perhaps, met with fairly swift approval by the Council. Briefly, the A.A.L. has come down in favour of a Municipal Libraries Section, but, as is now the fashion, *with strings*. Our stipulated strings are that the present branch structure shall be discontinued, that the formation of regional co-ordinating committees shall be encouraged, that the A.A.L. shall continue as the only section catering for assistants in all types of library, and that members shall be able to opt for *three* sections. We advocated the amalgamation of the proposed Municipal Section with the County Libraries Section, and thereby pleased Mr. Ferry, who "can't see any reason for the co-existence of county and municipal sections." Other suggestions were made, and these will emerge in due course.

We passed to consideration of the proposed L.A. syllabus revision, and quickly dismissed the G.L.D. view that wholesale revision was not necessary. The day was saved, as it has so often been for English cricket, by Yorkshire, who submitted a motion long enough to deserve a supplementary paper. This set out what Yorkshire considered should be the A.A.L.'s policy in this matter, and the Council went so far as to accept it with only the gentlest surgery—removing one paragraph only. It trans-

pired that the Yorkshire recommendations were substantially the same as those made by the L.A.'s own syllabus revision sub-committee. Some of the more suspicious saw the library schools as the link here, but as Mr. Thompson said, "collusion would, of course, never be approved." The Council now stands by a two-tier examination syllabus only, with Associateship awarded after the Final—or second—examination, and the Fellowship being a thing apart, awarded for a Thesis or some evidence of important or original work.

The next two items on the agenda were devoted to the Greater London Division. The first sought to congratulate the L.A., and the Membership Officer particularly, on "recent successes gained in negotiation concerning posts at inadequate salaries." The Council were unanimous in support, with the sole exception of Mr. Phillips, who called it "backscratching," and was himself called "ungracious" by Mr. Atkinson for his pains.

The second item was the long-awaited report on welfare and working conditions in special libraries. The Greater London Division Committee had produced this for the Council after years of effort, but it was not greeted with unqualified approval. Mr. Bubb underlined the complexity of the problem by explaining with beautiful simplicity to his municipal colleagues that non-public libraries are about as similar as "non-public houses." The Council decided to look before it leaps, and the Honorary Secretary was asked to obtain opinions on the report from special librarians "of his acquaintance" before the next meeting.

The A.A.L. Conference next year is to take place at University Hall, Liverpool, during the week-end commencing 28th March. Mr. Davinson sought the permission of the Council to make an immediate booking, and having obtained it, said: "I made the booking last week." Here at least is one man who is certain of the attractions of Liverpool.

The general consensus of opinion in the usual evening meeting place after the close of the session was that this was the busiest and most con-

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structive Council meeting for years. It is to be hoped that the Brighton School of Librarianship, who were present *in toto*, found it instructive and enjoyable. Two final comments should perhaps be made. The first is to record the most notable début for some time. Mr. Hoyle, who was present at his first meeting as a substitute for an absent Liverpool representative, made an impression that left many hoping that he will soon be attending in a more regular capacity. The other side of the record is that, the President apart, no lady member present contributed a word to the discussion. Did I hear Mrs. Pankhurst turn in her grave?

ERIC MOON.

*The West Midlands representatives ask that it should be made clear that they spoke at this meeting as members of the Birmingham Public Library Staff and not as Divisional Representatives as they had had no opportunity to consult their Divisional Committee.*

## What is a Primer?

### An Open Letter to the A.A.L.

from R. C. Bengé, Senior Lecturer, The Library School,  
North-Western Polytechnic

The A.A.L. has traditionally concerned itself with the needs of its youngest members. In recent years, however, the response to changed circumstances has been delayed and uncertain.

This comment is immediately provoked by the new edition of Mr. Hepworth's pioneer primer on *Assistance to Readers*. This is a genuine attempt to meet a new situation and makes no claims for permanence. I do not wish, therefore, to make a carping attack on this book as such, but rather to suggest that by its very nature it was bound to fail, since Mr. Hepworth is limited by certain assumptions which would seem to be still widely prevalent.

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In this field—as in others—we have had few good textbooks because there was nobody to write them. In the pre-war era there were valuable books on this subject, but they were not *textbooks*. Mr. Hepworth says that nowadays the subject “would scarcely be recognised by the McColvins, authors of *Library Stock and Assistance to Readers*.” This is natural enough since the subject as a proper field of *study* scarcely existed. The examinee was simply exhorted to examine carefully as many books as possible—the more the better. Robert's *Introduction to Reference Books*, which is limited to general reference material, is an adequate textbook; it is properly organised because it is based on a lecture course. In general I think it is fair to claim that textbooks should be produced only after teaching experience, because if this is lacking, the result may be needlessly confusing. A failure to appreciate this educational truism gives rise to the curious illusion that a practising librarian *by virtue of his experience* is capable of providing what is required. An annotated list of books is a necessity, but it is not a textbook; chapters which indicate to the student what he would know if he had the experience of the writer have a certain value, but it is a strictly limited one. Thus in Mr. Hepworth's primer this method is seen at its best in Chapter One, but at its most horrifying in the sections on general reference material and on the subject approach (Chapters 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13). Here the material is not *organised* and in consequence has little meaning to the student. So, for example, any lecturer as a result of his work will arrive at a simple arrangement of biographical sources: but in the primer these items are muddled up together so that the functional pattern is obscured. Similarly periodicals and the guides which list and analyse their contents lend themselves to systematic treatment: but in the primer the system is absent.

I mention these examples only to make the point clear. It is fundamentally a matter of order, and in so far as classification is used here it results in the alarming distinction between more and less difficult material

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—a distinction which is mainly subjective since it rests on the assumption that everybody works in small public libraries. Another pre-war assumption is that students will be studying in their spare time. Finally Mr. Hepworth refers to subject specialisation as “bold, visionary and impractical” forgetting that “the librarianship of to-morrow” which he mentions has been with us for some time; students in any event are not concerned with the past.

To sum up, Mr. Hepworth's primer is helpful and we should be grateful, but it would be unfortunate if students should conclude that the subject is as difficult as this. The purpose of this note is to protest firstly that this vital study is not so impossible after all, and secondly that the A.A.L. should readjust itself to current needs.

## Can You Do Better?

### An Open Letter to Mr. Bengé

from P. Hepworth, City Librarian of Norwich, and author of the latest A.A.L. Primer.

If practising tutors think any or all of our existing text books wrongly conceived, why do they not themselves write better ones, as they have, of course, far more time for this purpose than practising librarians?

Library school tutors who have a vested interest in full-time Librarianship training will not serve their cause best by shutting their eyes to the fact that the great majority of students still cannot attend library school. My *Primer*, quite naturally, as an official A.A.L. publication, had mainly correspondence course students in mind, and though it did not assume that “everyone works in small public libraries” it had in mind the needs of the vast majority of students of all types who do not work in large general libraries.

I am particularly sorry that Mr. Bengé should attack the new edition of my book as I consulted him after his criticism of the earlier edition, and definitely based the new edition on his own suggestions (Standing Committee on Education in Librarianship. *Notes for tutors. Assistance to Readers*. 1955). Before the book went to press, I satisfied myself that questions set in recent examinations could be answered from it if not adequately, at least much more satisfactorily than from the earlier edition.

As an honours graduate in history and a colleague of many correspondence course students, I am entitled to my own views as to whether the present examination is difficult or not, and I consider my own teaching experience at the Birmingham College of Commerce for some years compares in adequacy with the practical library experience of some full time tutors. Nor, having been on the staff of the Sheffield Public Libraries for some years, do I personally deserve the jibe about small libraries.

What is there “alarming” about a “distinction between more and less difficult materials”? Does not Mr. Bengé consider the L.A. examiners' regular comments on the way the *Assistance to Readers'* paper (particularly section C) is tackled, to be adequate evidence of difficulty? And now that he himself has escaped from the National Joint Council to the more generous bosom of the Burnham Committee and “the bloody Library Association has made its examinations ten times more difficult” (Braine: *Room at the Top*, p. 120), does he really think that the present Registration examination is a fair *qualifying* examination for a normal salary (in local government) of £625 p.a. (see the *Times Literary Supplement* back page), or perhaps he thinks there should be no relationship between salaries and prospects, and examinations.



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